

Grade 7 Visual Arts

Term 4 Study Notes

The history and development of cartoons

Ms S. Winkler | November 2026

Study the key words, visual examples and worked explanations in these notes. In the examination, apply what you know to the cartoon supplied and support your ideas with visible evidence.

Written exam	What to revise	Marks
Section A	Cartoon history and terminology	8
Section B	Art elements and design choices	8
Section C	Visual literacy and reflection	9

Total: 25 marks | Time: 60 minutes

1 How cartoons developed

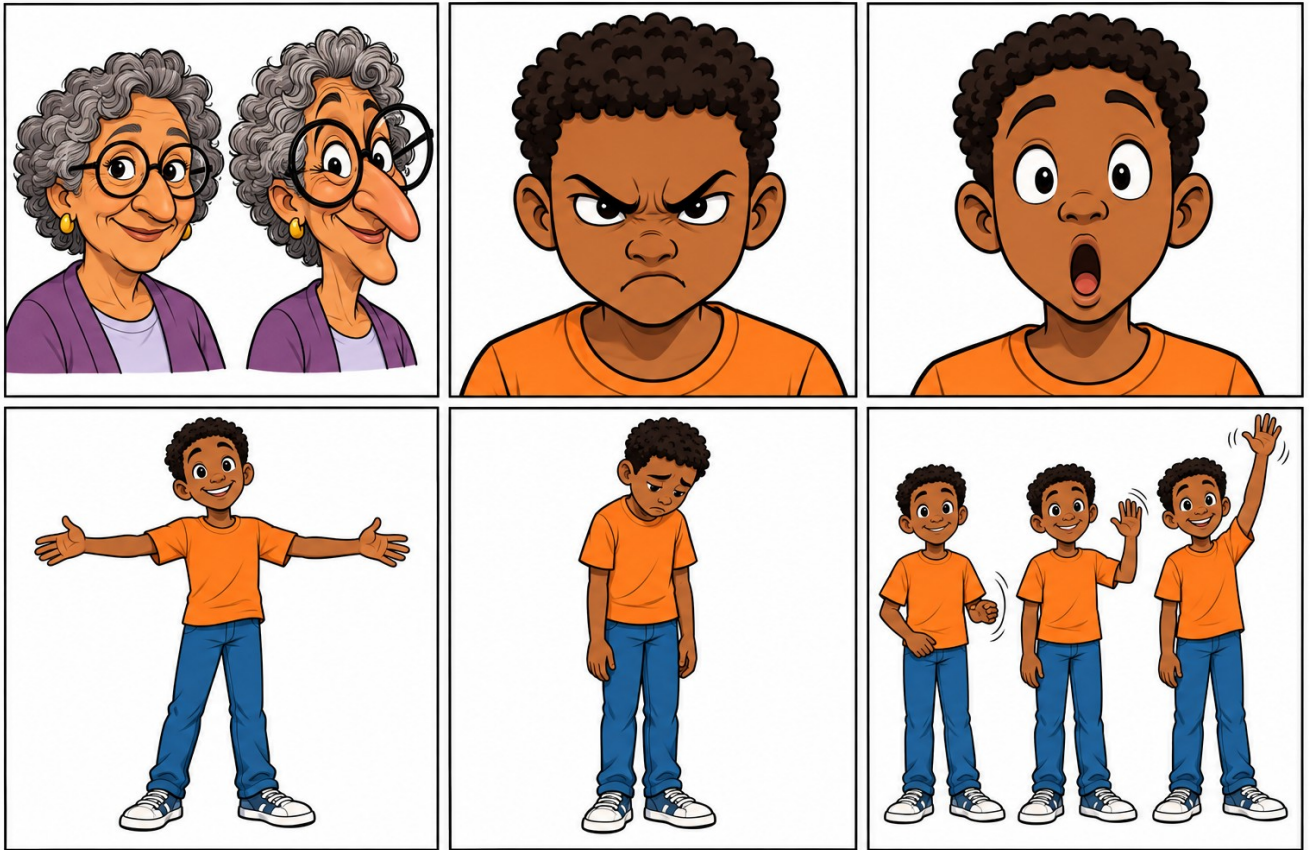
The broad class sequence is early caricature → newspaper cartoons → printed comic strips → early animation → colour and television animation → modern digital cartoons. Earlier forms continue to be used today; one form did not simply replace the next.

Form	What it means and how to recognise it
Cartoon	A simplified or exaggerated image that communicates an idea, story or message. It may entertain, persuade or comment on an issue.
Caricature	Exaggerates distinctive features of a person while keeping them recognisable, such as a familiar nose, hairstyle or glasses.
Newspaper cartoon	A cartoon published in a newspaper, often commenting on an event or issue. It may be a single image or a strip.
Comic strip	A story told through a sequence of panels. Each panel adds to the event or reaction.
Animation	Slightly different images shown quickly in sequence create an illusion of movement.
Traditional animation	Animation made using a sequence of drawings, commonly drawn by hand.
Digital cartoon	A cartoon created or presented using computer technology. It can be still or animated.

Remember: a cartoon is not always a television programme. “Digital” describes the technology used, while “comic strip” describes a way of telling a story.

2 Character expression and exaggeration

Cartoonists simplify shapes and exaggerate features to communicate quickly. Study the six examples from left to right, starting with the top row.



Top left — caricature. The larger nose and glasses attract attention, while the curly grey hair, glasses and clothing keep the person recognisable. Exaggeration changes proportion: the size relationship between parts.

Top middle — anger. The eyebrows slope down towards the nose, the eyes narrow and the mouth turns down. Together these features suggest anger.

Top right — surprise. Raised eyebrows, wide eyes and an open round mouth suggest surprise. Describe the feature as well as the emotion.

Bottom left and middle — body language. Open arms, an upright pose and a smile suggest confidence or happiness. A lowered head, rounded shoulders and hanging arms suggest sadness or disappointment.

Bottom right — movement. The arm appears in progressively higher positions. These poses could become frames in an animation. Curved lines beside the hand also suggest movement in a still image.

Worked explanation: “The lowered head and hanging arms suggest disappointment.” The visible detail supports the interpretation.

3 Line shape tone and texture

Line A mark with length and direction. Horizontal lines run across; vertical lines run up and down; diagonal lines slant. Lines can also be curved, jagged, thick or thin.

Expressive line: jagged marks can suggest tension; curved lines can suggest flowing movement. Thick outlines can separate a character from a background. Always link your explanation to the actual image.

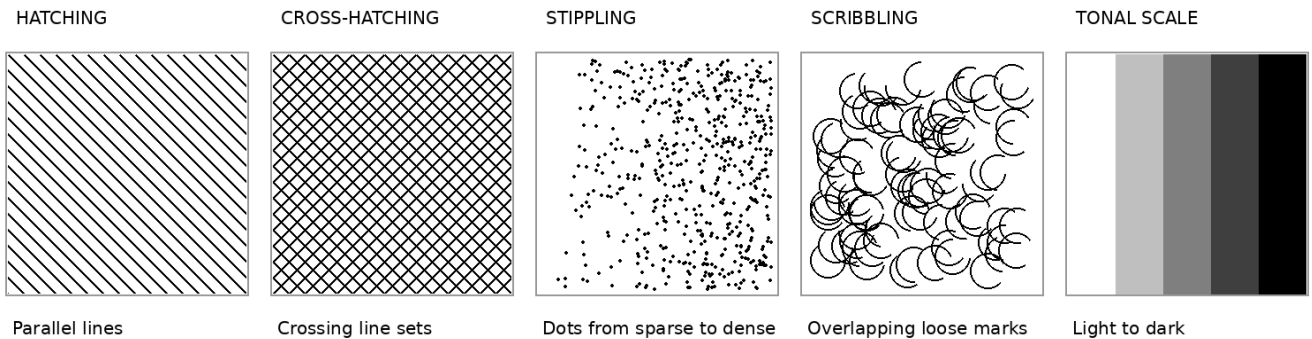
Shape A flat enclosed area. Geometric shapes are regular forms such as circles, triangles, squares and rectangles. Organic shapes are more irregular, like a puddle or leaf outline.

Proportion The relationship between the sizes of parts. A very large head on a tiny body changes normal proportion and may emphasise the facial expression.

Tone The lightness or darkness of an area. Tonal changes can make a flat circle look like a rounded ball.

Texture The surface quality shown or suggested, such as rough, smooth, soft or spiky. Drawn texture can make smooth paper appear to show fur, bark or fabric.

Recognise the mark making techniques



Technique	How it creates an effect
Hatching	Parallel lines. Closer or heavier lines usually create a darker tone.
Cross hatching	Crossing sets of lines. Extra layers or closer lines increase darkness.
Stippling	Dots. A dense group of dots appears darker than widely spaced dots.
Scribbling	Overlapping loose marks. Dense marks can create dark tone or suggest a rough texture.
Shading	A general way of making light and dark values. A tonal scale moves from light to dark.

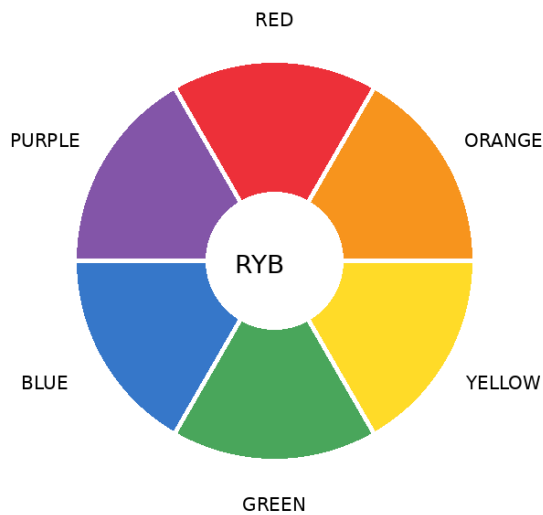
Worked explanation

"I would place dots close together on the side of the ball away from the light. I would spread the dots out on the lit side." This names stippling, explains the spacing and links it to tone.

Keep the terms separate: tone = light and dark; texture = surface quality. The same marks can help create both effects.

4 Colour and contrast

For this course, use the traditional red–yellow–blue colour model. The wheel shows the six main colours in order; complementary colours sit opposite each other.



SECONDARY COLOUR MIXES



Red + yellow = orange



Yellow + blue = green



Red + blue = purple

Key term	Study notes
Primary colours	Red, yellow and blue.
Secondary colours	Orange, green and purple. Each is made by mixing two primary colours.
Warm colours	Reds, oranges and yellows can suggest heat, energy or excitement.
Cool colours	Blues, greens and purples can suggest coolness, calm or mystery.
Complementary colours	Red and green; blue and orange; yellow and purple. These pairs create strong colour contrast.
Contrast	A noticeable difference between parts. It may involve colour, tone, size, shape or texture.

How colour helps a cartoon communicate

An orange character against a blue background can stand out because orange and blue are complementary colours. The contrast draws attention to the character and can create emphasis.

In a black-and-white image, a dark character against a light background can stand out through tonal contrast. Colour is not the only way to create contrast.

Colour and mood

Warm colours may make a scene feel energetic; cool colours may make it feel calm. These are possible effects, not fixed rules. Use the facial expression, setting and other details to support your interpretation.

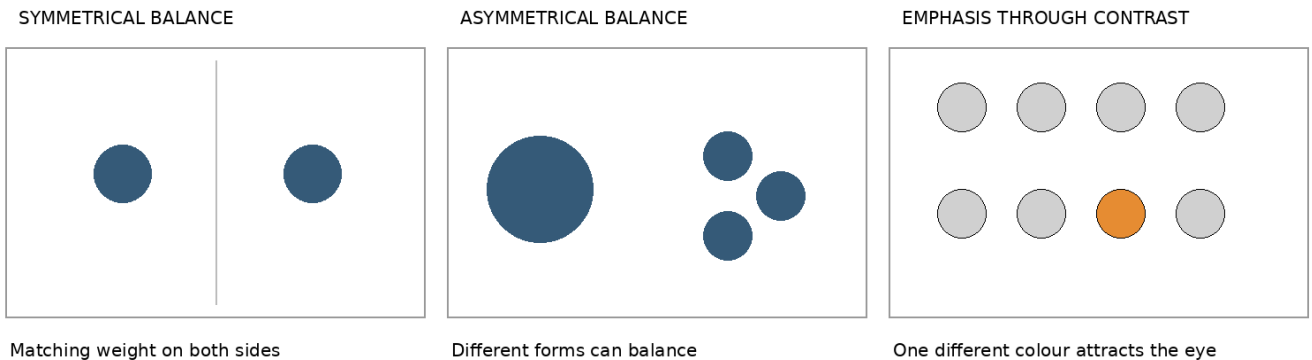
Worked explanation: “The bright yellow object contrasts with the purple background, so my eye goes to the object first.”

5 Composition and design principles

Composition The arrangement of the parts of an artwork. Placement, scale and empty space affect what viewers notice and how their eyes move.

Foreground and background The foreground appears closest to the viewer. The background appears farther away and helps establish the setting.

Focal point The area that attracts attention first. An artist can create it through size, contrast, detail or placement.



Balance The distribution of visual weight. Large, dark or strongly coloured forms may attract more attention than small, pale ones.

Symmetrical balance uses similar visual weight on either side of an imagined centre line. Asymmetrical balance uses different forms that still feel stable. Several small objects can balance one large dark shape.

Emphasis Making one part stand out. A large head, a bright colour among dull colours, or a dark outline can emphasise a character or feature.

Repetition Using a line, shape, colour or other feature more than once.

Rhythm A visual beat or flow created by repeating elements and controlling their spacing.

Movement The sense of action in an image, or the route your eye follows. Poses, motion lines and repeated shapes can suggest movement.

Worked explanations

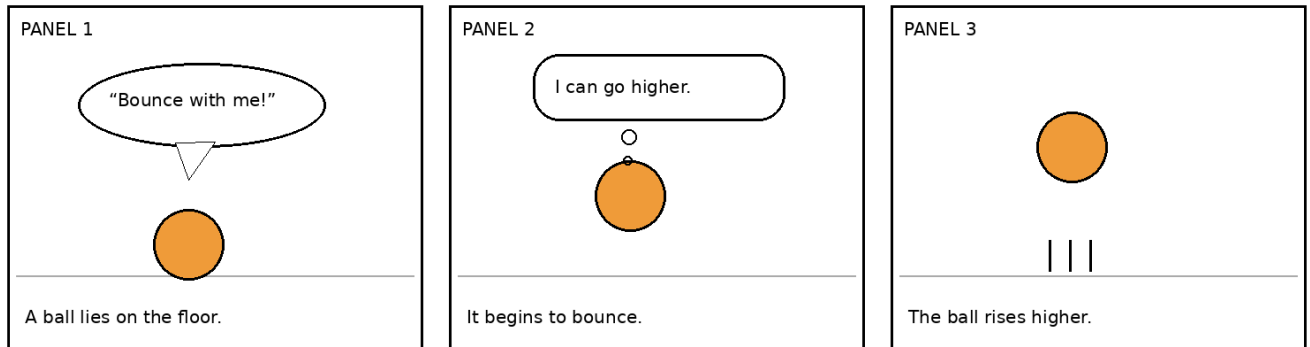
Balance: “I would place a group of smaller dark objects opposite the large character. Their combined visual weight would help balance the composition.”

Emphasis: “The enlarged eyes become the focal point, drawing attention to the surprised expression.”

Rhythm and movement: “Repeated footprints form a visual beat, and their direction leads the viewer’s eye towards the character.”

6 Comic strips and animation

A comic strip tells a story through panels. Read the sequence in order and connect the pictures with the words. A single panel shows one moment; later panels develop the action or show a result.



SPEECH BUBBLE: spoken words

THOUGHT BUBBLE: silent thoughts

MOVEMENT LINES: suggest action

CAPTIONS: the rectangular text areas below the pictures give information about events.

Term	Meaning
Panel	One framed part of a comic sequence.
Speech bubble	Shows spoken words. Its tail usually points towards the speaker.
Thought bubble	Shows unspoken thoughts. It often has a cloud-like outline and a trail of small circles.
Caption	Words below or beside the picture, or inside a separate caption box, giving information or commentary.
Character	The person, animal or object involved in the story.
Setting	Where and when the story takes place.
Movement lines	Lines that suggest the direction or speed of an action in a still image.

From still pictures to animation

Animation uses a sequence of slightly different images. When the images are shown quickly, the viewer sees an illusion of movement. To show a bouncing ball, change its position a little from one frame to the next. To show a wave, change the hand and arm positions.

Remember: motion lines suggest movement on a still page. Animation creates apparent movement by showing images over time.

How an additional panel develops a message

A useful next panel follows logically from the scene and makes its message clearer. For a cartoon about saving water, a later panel could show the character closing a dripping tap. A caption such as “Every drop counts” connects the action to the message.

7 Visual literacy and exam explanations

Visual literacy means interpreting images and explaining how their details communicate meaning. Begin with what you can actually see, then explain what it suggests.

A method for studying any cartoon

1. Identify the form: single cartoon, caricature, comic strip or animated image.
2. Observe characters, setting, objects, facial expressions, body language and words.
3. Identify art choices: line, shape, proportion, tone, texture, colour, contrast, balance and emphasis.
4. Interpret the message and support it with specific visual or written details.

Describe and explain

Description names a visible detail: “The mouth is open and round.” Explanation gives its meaning: “This suggests surprise.” Combine them when a question asks for a feature and its effect.

For a 2-mark response: give the detail and explain what it suggests. Example: “The eyebrows are lowered towards the nose, suggesting anger.”

Interpret a message using evidence

For a 3-mark question asking for a message and two details, give all three parts. Example: “The cartoon encourages people to save water. The dripping tap shows water being wasted, and the character closing it shows how one person can help.” Only use this explanation if those details are visible in the supplied cartoon.

Compare older and modern cartoon styles

Compare the actual artworks: line quality, colour or black-and-white tone, lettering, shading, detail, proportions and layout. Say what differs and explain its effect. A digitally made cartoon may imitate a hand-drawn style, so appearance alone does not prove how it was made.

Reflect on your own character design

Describe one specific change you actually made and the emotion it communicates. Example: “I changed the straight mouth into a smile to make my character look happy.” Use your own work in the examination.

Final revision checklist

Know the broad history sequence and cartoon forms. Recognise the art elements, design principles and mark-making techniques. Learn the primary, secondary and complementary colours. Explain facial expressions and body language using evidence. Describe how a new panel develops a message.

Sources and illustrations

Study content follows the supplied Grade 7 Term 4 Planner and both Grade 7 Visual Arts Term 4 examination papers. The character examples are original AI-generated teaching illustrations. The colour, technique, composition and comic-layout diagrams were created for these notes.